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**Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief, by Caroline Shaw; pp. xi + 311. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, £47.99, \$74.00.**

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troops and horses to the establishment of relief funds to the organization of prayer meetings. 1857 is, therefore, an ideal moment for the historian to delve into; it catches people at a time of crisis, and of panic, but it also reveals those seeking to exploit the event for their own gain. It reveals colonial capitalists penning letters urging that disbanded sepoys and convicted mutineers be despatched to work in their mines and on their plantations, Irish nationalists speculating on the ways in which to seize opportunities offered by fellow rebels, and panicked and fearful families spread over continents seeking to reassure and reunite their loved ones. Local terror of copy-cat uprisings counterbalanced the news of British victories, prompting much reflection as to the best means of managing civilian and military colonial subjects.

One of the most intriguing sections of the book picks apart a series of legislative debates held in various locations of the British Empire to determine attitudes toward a range of issues, such as how to deal with Maoris, Fenians, and a Xhosa chief. Bender argues that the threat of force and the sanctioning of violence toward such unruly colonial subjects became a central pillar of British power and can be read as part of the long shadow cast by the events of 1857, which, therefore, must be seen as “a defining moment in British imperial history” (181). This reading of the Indian uprising as an instrumental force in the creation of movements as diverse as Fenianism and Gandhian passive resistance serves as a timely reminder that the unleashing of fear and violence (whether by cataclysmic conflict or powerful demagoguery) sparks repercussions that protagonists can scarcely envisage or predict.

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**Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief**, by Caroline Shaw; pp. xi + 311. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, £47.99, \$74.00.

With *Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief*, Caroline Shaw has written a timely and important book. From the seventeenth century onward, the heartfelt embrace of refugees was a “nation-defining act” that proved central to the development of political liberalism and British identity (43). Employing a wide range of sources, from literary works to parliamentary papers, Shaw charts Britons’ changing attitudes toward refugees across three centuries. In her early chapters, she uncovers an early modern culture in which refugees were welcomed to Britain as “model liberal individuals” (78). Typical refugees, usually men, were depicted as heroic, self-acting freedom fighters. In her later chapters, however, Shaw accounts for the gradual “hardening of the humanitarian heart” in the late nineteenth century as Britons redefined refugees as economic liabilities (helpless women and children) or as potential security threats (205).

Shaw’s early chapters skillfully integrate British domestic politics with European and global developments. Early practices of refuge were rooted in religious asylum.

As Protestants fleeing Catholic absolutism, French Huguenots were readily integrated into British society. But the refugee category gradually expanded to new groups: United Empire Loyalists and French Revolutionary émigrés in the eighteenth century, and those displaced by Polish independence, Italian revolution, Ottoman and Russian oppression, and various other conflicts that threatened the Congress of Vienna's (1815) conservative equilibrium. Shaw's expertise is especially evident as she navigates the wide and ardent appeal of refugee relief across Britain's party-political spectrum. Radicals hoped their association with foreign dissidents would spark reform in Britain, while conservatives enshrined refugees as victims of heinous foreign tyranny. Some refugees provoked early efforts (like the 1793 Aliens Act, later revoked) to regulate immigration, laying the foundations of a modern security state. The fear that refugees from the Jacobin Terror were themselves terrorists in disguise is familiar to anyone in the age of ISIS. Despite these fears, however, Britain forged a new liberal geopolitics framed by moral imperatives rather than the self-interest of realpolitik. According to scholars like David Cesarani, Britain in the twentieth century was xenophobic and inward looking. But by returning our interest to an earlier period, Shaw unearths an era of surprising and impressive toleration.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Shaw argues, there emerged a powerful "narrative genre" that cast refugees as sympathetic and deserving figures. Some readers might be skeptical, however, of Shaw's claim that "broader humanitarian norms" were "robust enough to include foreigners of all political, social, religious and racial backgrounds" (74–75). The most interesting, though perhaps most problematic, claim is that fugitive African slaves could be considered refugees—and hence "full-fledged liberal individuals"—alongside French aristocrats and other European exiles (115). Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was indicative, Shaw suggests, of a normative conviction that escaped slaves exhibited essential commonalities with European political exiles. There is no doubt that abolition evinced powerful moral sentiments in Victorian Britain, but did Stowe's pamphlet really embody a norm, or was it a work of political activism written against prevailing attitudes? Instead of spotlighting a so-called standard narrative or "normative" stance, refugee politics might be better understood as a contest between multiple narratives and counter-narratives. Readers might also welcome an earlier and more vigorous engagement with race. As it stands, the claim that liberal humanitarianism was powerful enough to "override . . . racial prejudice" is not entirely convincing (94). And the settlement of African slaves in imperial outlets rather than in metropolitan Britain—the subject of chapter 4—is surely indicative of more than the "practical shortcoming[s]" to which Shaw alludes (94). Concepts like émigré, exile, and fugitive might also be more clearly distinguished from the seemingly all-embracing refugee category. Slaves were often termed fugitives rather than refugees, while French monarchists were normally referred to simply as émigrés. Terminology matters, as debates about defining migrants versus refugees demonstrate in our contemporary world.

The final chapters are particularly effective as Shaw outlines the late-Victorian winnowing of the refugee category to ever more restrictive legal and political definitions. Hardened racial outlooks toward fugitive slaves (Shaw does at last tackle race head on in chapter 7) and anti-Semitism directed at East-European Jews generated very different narrative tropes from the heroic Huguenots and romantic freedom fighters who previously sought refuge in Britain. Meanwhile, the growing association between political

asylum seekers and undesirable political groups like European communists, anarchists, and Fenians cast a growing shadow of suspicion over foreigners in general. Finally, Shaw attributes shifting mindsets to Britain's relative imperial and economic decline. As long as Britain had ample imperial outlets to settle refugees, it could pursue a tolerant policy without the potential economic and cultural consequences of populating its cities with foreigners. Liberal toleration was thus a register of imperial strength. But the narrowing of so-called imperial safety valves fostered more rigid attitudes, while Britain's loss of economic supremacy engendered fears about the burdens additional refugees would pose. Ultimately, these currents of anxiety and mistrust flowed into measures like the 1905 Aliens Act, which curbed the influx of migrants, while also cementing a liberal right of asylum (albeit on a more limited basis) for those truly in "danger [of] life or limb" (234).

Shaw considers imperial sites of refuge across the globe, but missing from her account is any extended discussion of refugees displaced by British imperial policies. Shaw lists the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) as a turning point toward jingoism and xenophobia, but she might pay more attention to the many thousands of refugees displaced by the conflict, both Britons and Boers (many of whom were suspected guerrillas-in-disguise and were described with demeaning racial language). In terms of sheer numbers, meanwhile, the largest group of refugees Britain encountered may have been the "famine refugees" of late-Victorian India (111). Though Shaw mentions them in passing, she might have noted the discursive dehumanization of Indian refugees who, like their Boer counterparts, were variously cast as lazy, improvident, disloyal, and unsanitary. Not only was their plight the catalyst for new technologies of humanitarian relief and security (refugee camps in particular) but their specter further eroded dominant images of refugees as model liberal subjects. Moreover, the victims of British, rather than foreign, oppression likely garnered different forms of sympathy and political commentary, thus further complicating positive images of the refugee as a category.

But quibbles aside, Shaw offers a significant contribution to the literature on refugees, humanitarianism, liberalism, and empire. In the wake of Brexit and the closing of borders by emerging far-right and illiberal movements across the western world, it is important not to lose sight of an earlier era in which liberal refugee policies were central to Britain's mission and interests as a great power. *Britannia's Embrace* deserves a wide readership.

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